

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – Feb 25 – Mar. 1, 2013
Bill Newell, Principal Washington School for the Deaf

Who is Sean Forbes?

- a) Founder of Sorensen Communications
- b) A former Executive Director of the National Association of the Deaf
- c) Founder of Purple Communications
- d) Founder of D-PAN, the Deaf Professional Arts Network

Go to the bottom of this message for the answer.

Answer: “d” – Sean Forbes is a contemporary Deaf hip-hop artist and founder of D-PAN, the Deaf Professional Arts Network.

The mission of D-PAN as stated on their website is as follows:

“D-PAN is dedicated to promoting professional development and access to the entertainment, visual and media arts fields for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

At D-PAN, everything we do begins by asking one fundamental question – given our strengths as an organization – How can we make the greatest positive impact on people’s lives?

We believe that our current initiatives – as well as those we will be launching in the near future – will be beneficial to the deaf, hard of hearing and hearing communities alike. So please take a look at what D-PAN has to offer by referring to the links at the top of the page ... and check back often because as our support grows, so will our programs.” [Cited from: <http://www.d-pan.com/>]

Not all Deaf people appreciate the use of American Sign Language in translation of songs. Thus the use of ASL in this way is somewhat controversial within Deaf culture. Deaf people who do not appreciate the use of ASL to translate songs feel that the practice is primarily directed toward the entertainment of hearing people who are either learning ASL or find songs rendered in ASL fascinating but may not have sufficient skill with ASL to actually judge whether there is any coherent meaning being expressed. To some Deaf individuals the use of ASL in this way is considered completely inappropriate and a “bastardization” of the language.

Obviously, however, there are some deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who find value in the use of ASL for song translation. Like any community and culture the Deaf community is very diverse. Individuals, although identifying with a community and culture, will hold many diverse viewpoints and have diverse and individual interests and preferences. It is important to recognize this. This Deaf Culture Question of the Week is presented because D-PAN is a contemporary phenomenon. It demonstrates a successful enterprise launched by an individual who is deaf. It represents an aspect of Deaf culture that is interesting and controversial. Persons studying Deaf culture or American Sign Language often find entertainment value in this use of ASL. They should, however, understand that it is controversial within Deaf culture and may not be considered by many Deaf people as an appropriate use of ASL.